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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000920

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI AMBASSADOR RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT GIERTYCH
TO PRESIDENT KACZYNSKI

REF: WARSAW 909

Classified By: Political Counselor Mary Curtin for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Israeli Ambassador to Poland David Peleg called on President Lech Kaczynski May 17 to express his government's concern over the appointment of Roman Giertych as Minister of Education, given Giertych's anti-Semitic associations and his new responsibility for Holocaust education programs. Kaczynski assured Peleg of his continuing commitment to strong Polish-Jewish relations. DCM expressed similar concerns to Kaczynski's foreign policy advisor, urging that the government reach out to the Jewish community, lest Kaczynski's efforts and Poland's progress in recent years be undone. Several mid- and senior-level government officials have expressed dismay over Giertych's appointment, and worry about its impact. Others are hopeful that pressure from the outside might lead the government to make progress on issues such as restitution legislation as a way of demonstrating its continued commitment to strong Polish-Jewish relations despite the questionable associations of Giertych and Self-Defense (SO) leader Andrzej Lepper. End Summary.

2. (C) Israeli Ambassador Peleg told us May 17 that, upon instructions from his government, he had met that day with President Lech Kaczynski to express Israel's concerns about the appointment of right-wing Catholic nationalist Roman Giertych from the League of Polish Families (LPR) as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education as part of the coalition government deal reached May 5 (Reftel). As we have noted, Giertych was responsible for reinvigorating the All Poland Youth organization, LPR's youth wing, known for its anti-Semitic and homophobic statements, and fascist leanings. While Giertych has been careful not to make any anti-Semitic statements himself, he has never distanced himself from or reined in the All Poland Youth, and in fact, brought many of its leaders into the Sejm on the LPR ticket in the 2005 parliamentary elections. His Deputy Education Minister, Miroslaw Orzechowski, edits a journal, Aspekt Polski whose on-line edition currently carries a story claiming "Jews are once again attempting to influence the course of current events in Poland," by criticizing the new government.

3. (C) Peleg said he expressed the Israeli government's deep concerns over Giertych's presence in the government, and in particular as Minister of Education, where he will oversee the Holocaust Education programs and youth exchanges that have done so much to change attitudes among young Poles in recent years. He also expressed concern that Kaczynski's own work as mayor of Warsaw to advance Poland's relations with the Jewish diaspora and with Israel would be damaged by the appointment. Peleg said that Kaczynski told him he would normally not receive any ambassador's complaint about domestic Polish issues, but that this was a special case. Kaczynski responded that he, and not Giertych, was in charge, and sought to downplay concerns about LPR, saying anti-Semitism was "problem of the past." He suggested LPR might split, marginalizing the extremists. He also said he would talk with Giertych to let him know "about the problems he has caused," and to warn him against taking the wrong steps. He suggested that one solution might be to remove the Holocaust Education programs from the Ministry of Education and have them run out of the Presidency or Foreign Ministry.

4. (C) DCM had earlier raised the issue with presidential foreign policy advisor Andrzej Krawczyk, presenting USG concerns about the potential reversal of the progress achieved in recent years in Poland's relations with the Jewish community. Noting Kaczynski's achievements, DCM stressed the unease emerging within the Jewish community and in Washington over Giertych's authority over Holocaust education. He urged that the President and government give consideration to ways in which they could reach out to the Jewish community, warning that failure to act would risk letting LPR and Self Defense (SO) shape Poland's international image on a sensitive topic. Krawczyk was already aware of a letter from Anti-Defense League (ADL) chairman Abraham Foxman to Poland's leadership. DCM advised that others could be expected.

5. (C) DCM said that Ambassador would convey our concerns in

his courtesy calls on Foreign Minister Anna Fotyga, Agriculture Minister Andrzej Lepper (SO), and Giertych himself, as well in a previously planned call on Minister of Interior Ludwig Dorn (who is close to the Kaczynskis). Krawczyk said he understood our concerns, and stressed President Kaczynski's personal commitment to combating anti-Semitism.

16. (C) We briefed Poland's Chief Rabbi, Michal Shudrick on our efforts, stressing that we are coordinating with the Israeli Embassy, that the GOP recognizes it has a problem and is considering real steps to address the situation. PolCouns discussed the issue with Peleg, Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska, Poland's ambassador-designate to Israel, currently the Prime Minister's advisor for Jewish affairs, and Maciej Kozlowski, the MFA Deputy Director of the Africa and Middle East department, responsible for Jewish diaspora affairs at a reception May 17. Magdziak-Miszewska and Kozlowski were open in their consternation over Giertych's appointment. We had heard that Magdziak-Miszewska had been "ill" since the coalition government was established. There were some rumors that she would resign rather than represent the current coalition, but she made clear she was committed to going to Israel, and to advancing close Polish-Israeli and Polish-Jewish diaspora ties. She was even hopeful that the government might push through the long-stalled restitution legislation and ensure continued strong Holocaust education as a way of proving their continued commitment to fighting anti-Semitism and maintaining strong Polish-Israeli and Polish-Jewish community ties. (Note: Other mid-level officials were not so hopeful, and feared the new coalition means there will be no progress on restitution. End Note)

17. (C) Comment: For the moment Giertych, rather than Lepper, has been the focus of concern because of his role as Education Minister, and concerns that he will impose his views not just on Holocaust education, but more broadly on the curriculum in Poland. Media attention in Poland has focused on Giertych's (and his associates') bombastic statements about homosexuals, accusing his critics of seeking to advance "homosexual propaganda" in the schools. We will continue to raise our concerns about Holocaust related issues and about tolerance more broadly with government officials, but do not expect the storm to die down soon. End comment.

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